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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/CRA, AND DRL/PHD

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SUBJECT: USG HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY FOR BURMA

REF: STATE 13796

1. (SBU) The following draft report is provided in response to tasking contained in reftel. The text of the report has also been sent by e-mail to EAP/BCLTV.

2. (SBU) Begin report text:

Embassy Rangoon Human Rights Strategy for Burma

The United States has staked out a position in Burma as a resolute advocate of human rights and rapid political change.

We have also worked with like-minded countries to maintain maximum international pressure on Burma, pending reform. That pressure includes continued trade, investment, and travel sanctions; the denial of any form of aid support, with the single exception of humanitarian assistance; continued public criticism of Burma; support for democratic movements opposed to the current dictatorship; and public diplomacy programs focused on democratic values, human rights, and good governance. It also includes support for international efforts to foster change in Burma, through the missions of UN Special Envoy Razali and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Pinheiro, as well as the efforts of the ILO, the ICRC, and other international organizations.

**Sanctions:** In coordination with the European Union and other states, the United States has imposed comprehensive sanctions on Burma. They include an arms embargo; a ban on all new U.S. investment in Burma; the suspension of all bilateral aid, including counternarcotics assistance; the withdrawal of GSP privileges, the denial of OPIC and EXIMBANK programs; visa restrictions on Burma's senior government officials; and a hold on all new lending or grant programs by the World Bank, the IMF, the ADB, and other international financial institutions. We have also maintained our representation in Burma at the Charge d'Affaires level since 1990.

**Public Criticism:** The United States has co-sponsored annual resolutions at the UN General Assembly and the UN Commission on Human Rights that highlight and draw international attention to the continued human rights violations in Burma. We also support the ILO's unprecedented decision which calls on all ILO members to review their relations with Burma in view of its "widespread and systematic" use of forced labor, as well as the ILO's efforts since then to bring the Burmese government in compliance with its obligations. Annual U.S. reports on human rights and religious freedom in Burma have also painted a grim picture of continuing violations here.

**Public Scrutiny:** The United States has encouraged increased public scrutiny of the human rights situation in Burma. We have supported the missions of UN Special Envoy Razali, who has traveled to Burma eight times since 2000, and the mission of UN Special Rapporteur Pinheiro, who has visited Burma four times. Their combined efforts have resulted in the release of over 500 political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, additional freedoms for the political opposition (particularly in regard to ability to travel), and the re-opening of opposition political party offices. We have also encouraged ICRC's efforts to improve the conditions of Burma's prisons, facilitate the release of political prisoners, and protect vulnerable ethnic populations. ICRC now has over 40 expatriate staff in Burma and access to many previously restricted areas along the Thai border. In addition, we have urged all UN agencies to join UNHCR (now active among the Rohingya Muslim minority in northern Rakhine State) in providing protection services and advocacy on human rights issues in areas where they are active. Finally, we have pushed the Burmese government to accept visits by reputed international human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, which completed its first visit to Burma in February 2003.

**Support for the Democratic Opposition:** The United States annually provides \$6.5 million in support for the Burmese democratic opposition. These funds are programmed through the National Endowment for Democracy, among others, and are used for the collection and dissemination of information on democracy and human rights, and the support of democratic groups, including women's, labor, and ethnic groups, in Burma and along Burma's borders. Specific activities include

support for newspapers, radio broadcasts, and investigations of human rights violations, as reported by refugees and exiles.

**Advocacy:** The U.S. Mission in Burma has been a persistent and effective advocate for human rights. We maintain frequent contacts with the political opposition, including the National League for Democracy and Aung San Suu Kyi, and regularly consult with a range of opposition leaders regarding initiatives that will affect the struggle for democracy in Burma. We maintain similar contacts with representatives of Burma's ethnic minorities who have been struggling for a voice in Burma's government for more than half a century. We have also pressed the government in strong and public terms to honestly and effectively investigate allegations of human rights abuses. In 2002, when the Burmese government categorically denied that its soldiers had been involved in any of the rapes detailed in a report entitled "License to Rape," the Mission's Charge' called the government to account at a public press conference and continued to press for an investigation of the charges by an independent international team. Those efforts resulted in continued international attention to the case, continued government investigations of the charges, and a government invitation to UN Special Rapporteur Pinheiro to investigate the case. The U.S. Mission in Burma has also spoken out firmly in support of the political rights of the democratic opposition. When Aung San Suu Kyi was harassed by government-affiliated organizations during a tour of Rakhine State, the U.S. Mission coordinated statements with Great Britain, among others, which called the government to account.

**Public Diplomacy:** We continue to focus public diplomacy programs on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance. In FY 2002, the Embassy's Public Affairs section spent \$205,000 on speaker programs, exchange programs, and publications and other information outreach. In FY 2003, we expanded our international visitors program by \$105,000 to include six additional grantees from civil society organizations active in their communities. In addition, the Public Affairs section's direct teaching program offered tuition waivers worth \$8,000 to 33 students denied the opportunity to study elsewhere because of their political beliefs. These programs target individuals from humanitarian aid NGO's, the political opposition, religious and ethnic groups, the press, and academia, with the aim of assisting civil society organizations in developing their own effective advocacy on democracy and human rights issues in Burma.

**Addendum: USG-funded Human Rights and Democracy Programs in Burma (FY 2002)**

Burma Earmark -- \$6.5 million, including

The New Era Journal; \$140,000

Support and Training for Democratic Opposition; implemented by the International Republican Institute; \$470,000

Building Capacity for a Free Burma; implemented by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; \$122,535

The Burma Fund; \$450,000

The Democratic Voice of Burma radio; \$160,000

Promoting Labor's Involvement in Burma's Democratic Struggle; implemented by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity; \$425,033.

End report text.  
Martinez